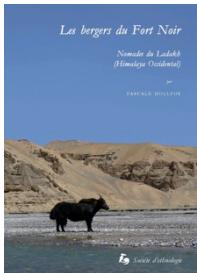


REVIEW: *LES BERGERS DU FORT NOIR*

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Pascale Dollfus. 2012. *Les bergers du Fort Noir. Nomades du Ladakh (Himalaya occidental)* Société d'ethnologie (collection "Haute Asie"). 343pp. bibliography, glossary, and transliteration of names. ISBN 978-2-901161-99-8 (paper 18.46£).

This is a detailed ethnography by Pascale Dollfus of the Kharnakpa (Mkhar nag pa), a small community of Ladakhi nomads living at more than 4,200 meters in the Indian state of Jammu-Kashmir. The total population was only 150 in 2004, down from 375 in 1992, and 261 in 1996. The author started her fieldwork in the 1990s, and was thus able to observe the slow disappearance of the way of life of the shepherds of the Black Fort over the last twenty years.

The book features thirteen chapters. The first deals with the problem of the definition of the terms 'nomads' and 'nomadism' and the relations between nomads and sedentary people. The author provides accounts related to the nomads of Ladakh that were written by missionaries, adventurers, scientists, and civil servants. In the second chapter, Dollfus questions the origins of the Ladakhi people, and more specifically of the Kharnakpa population, making use of written chronicles and oral traditions. In the third chapter, the community's religious life is introduced. All members belong to the Drugpa Kagyü ('Brug pa bka' brgyud) sect of Tibetan Buddhism and consider Dat Monastery their ideal religious center, where all gather for the spring *gyetsa* (*dge rtsa*) festival, which is described in detail.

The fourth chapter deals with the social organization of these nomadic pastoralists who, in spite of the 1941 law prohibiting polyandry, still practice this type of marriage in order "to have a joint

task force allowing a division of labor or even some specialization" (83). The fifth chapter describes the political organization centered on the figure of the '*go ba*' chief whose election, at present, takes place every year by drawing lots. The sixth chapter returns to the question of the opposition between high altitude nomads and sedentary valley people and looks at the images of Ladakhi nomads produced by travelers since the seventeenth century. Chapters seven and eight deal with the identity of the Kharnakpa as herders and give a description of their animals – yaks, goats, sheep, horses, and dogs – and activities related to animal husbandry.

In the ninth chapter, the author discusses local nomads' perception of their territory, as a combination of routes connecting sites:

a territory with blurred contours which may at any time be removed, rebuilt, enlarged or decreased depending on water resources or forage, increase or decrease of livestock, political crises or divine injunctions (162).

Chapter Ten is concerned with black and white tents, and the replacement, little by little, of the traditional black yak-hair tent by ready-made white cotton tents. The author also points out that permanent houses are increasingly numerous as winter habitations. The Karnakpa move six times a year in response to pasture conditions, the availability of water, and religious events. The cycle of nomadisation is the focus of Chapter Eleven. The final two chapters are again dedicated to the territory, but this time in relation to the various activities of the Kharnakpa.

The author's keen observation is evident throughout the book. Attention to detail transports the reader into the nomads' world. Many of the specific examples Dollfus supplies are based on personal encounters during her years of field research. A remarkable characteristic of the book is the use of an extensive specialized vocabulary, as Dollfus makes use of the rich literature from various fields, including geography, botany, and zoology. This ethnography of an endangered pastoral population will attract not only readers from

academic circles, but also travelers and admirers of these populations that live at such high altitudes.